No. 18. On the devout Observance of the Lord's-Day.

58th Isaiah, 13th, 14th.

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

That the day which Almighty wisdom has set apart for the commemoration of the wonderful works of his creation and providence, of his mercy and love in the redemption of our souls, should be regarded as a day of indolence or amusement, of business or dissipation, which it confessedly is, by a great part of even the Christian world, is a circumstance we cannot too

deeply lament, nor labor too urgently to correct. If the design of the Lord's-Day is to impress on our minds our own weakness and insufficiency, our dependence upon God for every blessing both of this life and another; if it be to wean our affections gently from this earthly scene, & to prepare us for an eternal abode, to celebrate an everlasting Sabbath—shall we frustrate its merciful design by "doing our own "ways, by finding our own pleasure, or speaking our "own words," prostituting it to trifling amusements, unnecessary visits, or servile occupations? No. "Remember," says the Commandment, "whose writing "is the writing of God, remember the sabbath day to "keep it holy."

My purpose in this discourse is to consider in what manner the Sunday ought to be kept, together with the advantages arising from the institution; after which I shall earnestly exhort you to the devout and religious observance of it.

Now "to keep holy the sabbath," or in the words

of the text, to "call the sabbath a delight, the holy of "the Lord," it is not sufficient merely to attend pub= lic worship, and then to think the business of the day over. No. To "call the sabbath a delight, the holy "of the Lord," is to put our souls into a heavenly frame and temper—to meditate on the dreadful state of man without a Redeemer, and on the stupendous method by which our Redemption was accomplished— to return our devout thanksgivings to Almighty=God for his superabundant love expressed towards us—to make our wants known unto Him, both temporal & spiritual—to beseech Him to be always with us to pro= tect us and bless us—to devote some part of the day to the serious perusal of the Holy Scriptures, that we may observe his approbation of goodness, and his displeasure at vice, and, more particularly, that we may know and understand in how peculiar a manner we Chris= tians are the objects of his love, and may thereby en= deavor more and more to please Him. This is to be done in our closet and our family. But to keep holy

the ſabbath day, we are likewiſe to attend the public worſhip of God in the congregation. There we are to diveſt our minds of every thought which would withdraw our affections from ſpiritual objects, and prevent, in any degree, our "worſhipping God in ſpirit and "truth." If any man object to this univerſal ſanctity on the ſabbath day, I appeal to that man's heart in the preſence of God, who knows every thought of it, if his objection does not ariſe from his averſion to religious and ſpiritual exerciſes? I appeal to his conſcience, if he does not feel more pleaſure in the exerciſe of his buſineſs, the improvement of his wealth, the gratification of his appetites, or the bent of his mind, whatever it be, than in the worſhip of God and the celebration of Religion. The Lord's-Day is deſigned as an emblem of Heaven. If the felicity of Heaven conſiſts in a pure and ſpiritual worſhip, in "ſinging day and "night to Him that was, and is, and is to come, "to the Lamb that was ſlain but liveth for ever;" ought we not to conſider the Lord's-Day as an ex-

cellent preparative for that divine employment? For if we nauseate the foretaste of Heaven, which, God, by this holy Institution, has given us here, Eternity, in whatever light we view it, presents but a melancholy and comfortless prospect. The devout observance of the Lord's-Day will evangelize our minds, will raise them from things below to things above, will qualify us to participate the joys reserved for those who are thought worthy to celebrate an eternal sabbath in Heaven.

The institution of the Lord's-Day is peculiarly calculated to celebrate our Redemption from sin, and deliverance from death, by the merits of Jesus Christ. That day God the Father blessed, God the Son rose on that day from the dead; on that day God the Holy Ghost descended from heaven, to complete the work of our Salvation. And can we be Christians, and not delight in that blessed day in which the wonderful love of God, to his creatures, is so conspicuously displayed? Can we be Christians, & not rejoice in the return of that

holy day in which we celebrate our Redemption from misery, in which we behold, by faith, the happiness to be enjoyed by those who love God & obey his will? Can we be Christians, & not rejoice to commemorate that distinguished day, which, though instituted for His honor, was instituted at the same time for our good? a good, which surpasses every human tongue to recount, every human thought to conceive.

The advantages resulting from this divine institution will easily appear by taking the slightest view of the polished nations of antiquity, and the savage tribes of the present times, who were never blessed with a knowledge of that sacred day. St. Paul delineates the character of the former; and from every account given us by those who have visited the latter, there is, God knows, too striking a resemblance. "Being filled "with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, "covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, de- "ceit, malignity, backbiters, haters of God, inventers "of evil things, disobedient to parents, covenant breakers

"without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." And I shall not be thought uncharitable in saying that those in a Christian country, who are notorious for the profanation of the sabbath, are guilty, in an eminent degree, of many of their vices. This indeed is easy to be accounted for. When men never hear the denunciations of God against vice, and have been brought up with scarce a sense of God on their minds; when they never hear exhortations to virtue and religion; when they live without worshipping God in private, and never join in any act of religious worship with their fellow creatures; can it be a matter of surprize, that, as they openly violate the commands of God, they should advance, with a rapid and progressive motion, neither "to fear God nor regard man?"

It is perhaps to the institution of the sabbath that Religion is preserved alive in the world. For by having a fixed time to worship God, those who would bestow their leisure to estimate the value, and devote their lives to entitle themselves to the blessings of Religion,

have, in every age of Christianity, assembled to perform their public devotions, and communicated the influence of them to their children and family.— By which means, Religion, though disregarded by the Great, despised by the Vulgar, ridiculed by the Licentious, and evil-intreated by the Profane, has not only withstood their several attacks, but triumphed over their united hostilities.

I come now to expostulate with those, who, notwithstanding the advantages derived from the sabbath, live in the profanation of it.

To know that God has commanded the sabbath to be kept sacred to Himself, would be sufficient, one might imagine, to prevail with every human being, to whom the knowledge was imparted, religiously to observe it. Would to God experience coincided with this reasonable expectation! How those men, who do their own pleasure on God's holy-day, intend to justify their insolent conduct towards their Maker, is not easily to be conceived. Would to God I could prevail on them to con-

sider, ere it be too late, how they will stand like criminals, self-accused, and self-convicted, before the Great Tribunal, without one single argument to urge in their excuse! Would to God I could prevail on them to consider, ere it be too late, the benevolent design of the Almighty in instituting the sabbath day, that it is for their unspeakable advantage, both present and future! Now, when God purposely offers an advantage to man, what can be said in vindication of him who spurns the gracious offer? with what black ingratitude, with what presumptuous disobedience, with what daring provocations does that man stand chargeable? There must surely be a wonderful pleasure in spending the Lord's Day in idleness, drinking, and debauchery, when it is considered, that "they who do such things," are wantonly violating the sacred laws of God, and bringing down upon their own heads, "indignation and "wrath, tribulation and anguish." The day God has distinguished by commanding not only a cessation from labor, but an actual celebration of religious worship, to

devote to idleneſs, buſineſs, or pleaſure, what is it but a perſonal indignity?—What it is but ſaying we would not, could we chuſe for ourſelves, "have God to reign "over us?" And what it is to put ourſelves without the ſphere of divine protection, what it is to make God-Almighty our enemy, ye, who profane the ſabbath, reconcile the thought, if ye can, with the pleaſure ariſing from the profanation of it.

Let me appeal to the man who ſometimes attends the ſervice of the Church, and aſk him if there is not more ſatisfaction in publicly confeſsing his ſins, and begging pardon for them—though he may not, and ſuch an one cannot feel a real vital ſpirit of piety—than in remaining at home in indolence, or wandering abroad "ſeeking reſt and finding none," or partaking of pleaſure which is attended with painfulneſs in the purſuit, with diſappointment in the poſſeſſion, & with remorſe in the reflection? Let me appeal to the man, "who careth not for God, neither has God "in all his thoughts," and aſk him, when millions

of creatures throughout the Christian world are prostrating themselves at the throne of mercy, and glorifying God, as it were, with one voice and one heart, supplicating forgiveness, favor, support, if he has not the same need of the pardon of his sins, of the protection of God, of the influences of Grace? Let me appeal to the man, who "keeps not the sabbath from polluting it," and ask him, if the Lord's-Day be an emblem of Heaven, if it be designed to prepare him for the celebration of an everlasting sabbath, what pleasure he is to expect in the unceasing adoration of God, who cannot bestow a few hours, on the return of every seventh day, upon his Maker and Redeemer? Or if he has so much the appearance of Religion as to attend public worship, he cannot devote the remainder of the day to serious meditation, private prayer, and the acquisition of "that "knowledge which will make him wise unto salva"tion," but spends it either listless and indolent, or in the fatigues of business or the amusements of company. Could it be supposed that such a man had received an

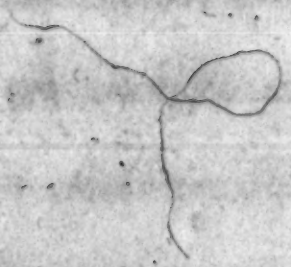
express command from God to "esteem the sabbath a "delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable, and to honor "it by refraining to do his own ways, to find his own "pleasure, or to speak his own words?" Could it be supposed that such an one put in a claim to the happiness of serving God for ever and ever? It is a melancholy consideration that the smallest pretence of indisposition, the very apprehension of unfavourable weather, the most trifling engagements, or the least call of business, will prevent many, very many, from appearing at "the house of God, and joining with the multitude "in praise and thanksgiving." How natural it seems that, on the return of every seventh day, the poor should assemble at the house of God to beg his blessing and protection, and to return thanks for the health, & strength, and employment afforded them by which they are enabled to support themselves and their families! that the remaining part of the day should be employed in reflecting on their condition, and preparing for that state, where all distinctions, but those of Religion

ceaſe! How natural that the rich ſhould teſtify their ſenſe of God's goodneſs by aſſembling with thoſe to whom God has denied ſo large a ſhare of worldly comforts, & that they would not ſuffer their attendance on public worſhip to be interrupted by an excurſion of pleaſure, an engagement of buſineſs, or a viſit of ceremony! The Lord's Day requires of them a very different obſervance. He who inſtituted it for his honor and our benefit, He it is to whom they are indebted for the means of pleaſure, the avocations of buſineſs, the diſtinctions of ceremony—and ought engagements, ſuch as theſe, to take place of His honor? "Do ye thus re-"quite the Lord?" How natural that the opportunities of happineſs which are ſo kindly put into your hands ſhould be improved to your eternal ſalvation!

Let us all be perſuaded, my Brethren, henceforth to "hallow the ſabbath, to ceaſe on that day from "doing our own ways, ſeeking our own pleaſure, or "ſpeaking our own words," but let us delight ourſelves in the worſhip and ſervice of God; let us, on that day,

particularly, "call our ways to remembrance," exa-
mining, with strict impartiality and severe attention,
whether the day which was intended to promote, above
all others, our future welfare, has not often been converted
to the purposes of torpid indolence or licentious pleasure.
Let the many fatal examples of those whose career in
wickedness was commenced by prophaning the sabbath,
& terminated by an untimely death, warn every father
& every master of a family, lest the unhappy end of his
children or any part of his houshold should rack him
with the reflection, that, either seduced by his example,
or encouraged by his connivance to profane the Lord's
Day, the guilt they incur, the punishment they may
suffer, should be owing to himself. And let us often
anticipate the awful hour when we shall lie on the bed
of death, an inhabitant, as it were, of both worlds,
whether we shall be distracted with terror; warning,
beseeching, conjuring our assembled family, not to spend
the sabbath in the manner we have spent it:——or whe-
ther, looking upon death without affright and amaze-

ment, we can exhort them, as we have done, to "do "likewise;" expressing humble hopes, that, through the merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, after having passed our sabbaths in the congregations of men on earth, we shall soon be admitted to celebrate an eternal sabbath with Saints & Angels in Heaven.

Theophs. J. St. John.

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